

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 EB-11 AID-20 IGA-02 AGR-20

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----- 101891

R 291130Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3205

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 10490

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EGEN, EAID, MOPS, MILI, CB

SUBJECT: RICE AIRLIFT AND REOPENING ROUTE 5

REF: A. STATE 194488 B. PHNOM PENH 10372

1. WE MOST APPRECIATE AUTHORIZATION TO PROCEED WITH RICE AIRLIFT FROM BATTAMBANG TO PHNOM PENH. THIS MESSAGE IS IN RESPONSE TO YOUR REQUEST (PARA 3 REF A) FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS OF FANK CAPABILITY TO OPEN ROUTE 5 TO TRUCK CONVOYS.

2. WE BELIEVE THAT REGIONAL FORCES NOW COMMITTED OR LIKELY TO BECOME AVAILABLE FOR THIS OPERATION ARE NOT ONLY UNABLE TO OPEN ROUTE 5 BUT COULD NOT HOLD IT FOR THE REQUIRED TIME FRAME WERE IT TO BE OPENED BY OTHERS. THE ENEMY HAS AN ESTIMATED SIX BATTALIONS ON ROUTE 5 AND CAN BRING TWO OTHERS TO THE SCENE IN SHORT ORDER. FANK HAS FIVE BATTALIONS TO THE NORTH AND THREE TO THE SOUTH.

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THESE ARE ALL UNDERSTRENGTH AND HAVE THUS FAR GIVEN RATHER

THAN TAKEN GROUND. THIRD MILITARY REGION COMMANDER BG SEK SAM IETH, WHO HAS DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NORTHERN SECTOR, HAS BEEN THINKING OF REINFORCING WITH TWO BATTALIONS FROM BATTAMBANG AND POSSIBLY TWO MORE FROM SIEM REAP. ENEMY ACTIVITY HAS RECENTLY PICKED UP NORTH OF BATTAMBANG CITY, HOWEVER, AND SE SERIOUSLY QUESTION WHETHER SEK SAM IETH WILL RELEASE ANY OF THESE BATTALIONS FOR THE ROUTE 5 OPERATIONS. EVEN WERE HE TO RELEASE ALL FOUR, THE COMBINED FANK FORCES WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE ADEQUATE TO OPEN OR EVEN HOLD THE ROUTE FOR THE TIME REQUIRED.

3. WE STRONGLY OPPOSE THE USE OF GENERAL RESERVE UNITS TO OPEN AND HOLD ROUTE 5 FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS (IN ADDITION TO THOSE PROVIDED REF B);

A. IN AUGUST FANK ADOPTED, THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL APPROVE, AND COMUSSAG AND THIS MISSION ENDORSED A DEFENSE PLAN FOR PHNOM PENH WHICH PROVIDES FOR THE COMMITMENT OF GENERAL RESERVE UNITS ONLY FOR THE PHNOM PENH DEFENSE PERIMETER AND THE PROTECTION OF ROUTE 4 AND THE MEKONG. ROUTE 5, WHICH WAS CONSIDERED NOT VITAL UNTIL THE NEXT RICE CROP IS HARVESTED, WOULD UNDER THIS PLAN BE LEFT TO REGIONAL TROOPS.

B. THE CURRENT SITUATION BEARS OUT THE SOUNDNESS OF THIS PLAN. ALTHOUGH GENERAL RESERVE UNITS HAVE CLEARED ROUTE 1 TO NEAK LOEUNG, TAKEN UP THEIR ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES AROUND THE PHNOM PENH PERIMETER, AND EXTENDED THIS PERIMETER IN CERTAIN KEY SECTORS, THEY HAVE SOME WAY TO GO BEFORE THEY WILL HAVE ATTAINED THE POSTURE WHICH WE FEEL WILL BE REQUIRED TO MEET THE ENEMY'S PLANNED DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. ROUTE 4 IS STILL THREATENED, THE ENEMY HAS JUST RECENTLY PUSHED BACK UP TO THE PREK THNAOT RIVER IN THE ROUTE 201 AREA (THUS THREATENING TO BRING THE CITY AGAIN WITHIN 105 MM HOWITZER RANGE), AND, MOST IMPORTANT, THE JOB OF REFILLING AND REFITTING THE GENERAL RESERVE UNITS FOR THE TESTS AHEAD HAS HARDLY BEEN BEGUN.

C. IT NOW APPEARS NECESSARY TO REINFORCE THE ROUTE 201 AREA WITH ANOTHER BRIGADE FROM THE FIRST DIVISION. WHEN

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THIS IS DONE, INTERVENTION FORCES IN RESERVE WILL CONSIST OF ONLY THE FIRST BRIGADE OF THE FIRST DIVISION AND ONE M-113 SQUADRON. AS STATED IN REF B, WE BELIEVE THAT A FORCE OF AT LEAST THIS SIZE WOULD BE REQUIRED TO OPEN ROUTE 5.

4. THE OPTION OF COMMITTING ALL AVAILABLE RESERVE FORCES TO A LENGTHY AND PERHAPS COSTLY OPERATIONS WHEN THEY

SHOULD BE PREPARING TO COUNTER A DECEMBER OFFENSIVE CAN-
NOT BE CONSIDERED A VIABLE TRADE OFF FOR A RICE AIRLIFT FROM
BATTAMBANG TO PHNOM PENH. IT SHOULD BE NOTED IN THIS RESPECT
THAT THE COST OF MOVING RICE BY AIR FROM BATTAMBANG TO
PHNOM PENH DOES NOT COMPARE ALL THAT UNFAVORABLY WITH OTHER
TRANSPORTATION COSTS. WE CANNOT ESTIMATE WITH PRECISION
WHAT THIS AIRLIFT COST WILL BE SINCE IT DEPENDS ON THE
RATES OF BILLING USED, DEAD TIME, ETC., BUT ESTIMATE
BETWEEN \$75 TO \$90 A TON. BY COMPARISON, THAI RICE
WILL COST ABOUT \$40 PER TON TO SHIP FROM BANGKOK TO CAMBODIA
AND LATEST BID FOR PL 480 WHEAT FREIGHT FROM U.S. TO
CAMBODIA WAS AROUND \$160 PER TON.

5. WE SHALL CONTINUE TO URGE FANK TO STRENGTHEN THE
REGIONAL FORCES AND THE COMMAND STRUCTURE ON ROUTE 5 SO
AS TO HELP FORCE AN EVENTUAL ENEMY WITHDRAWAL. WE SHOULD
NOT EXPECT, HOWEVER, A MILITARY BREAK-THROUGH WHICH WOULD
PERMIT US TO MOVE PART OF THE CURRENT BATTAMBANG RICE
STOCKS TO PHNOM PENH BY ROAD CONVOY.

6. AS REGARDS MOVEMENT OF THE NEXT CROP, THE CHARGE
EMPHASIZED TO PRESIDENT LON NOL THIS MORNING THAT
ROUTE 5 MUST BE OPENED IN JANUARY AND THAT FANK MUST
NOW CONCENTRATE FULLY ON MAKING THE GENERAL RESERVE
EQUAL TO THAT TASK. INDEED FANK IS ALREADY RUNNING
SHORT OF DAYS REQUIRED TO FIND, EQUIP AND TRAIN TROOPS
TO FILL DEPLETED RANKS. LON NOL AGREED WITH THIS CONCEPT
AND SAID HE IS PREPARED TO DISCUSS HOW IT MIGHT BE
IMPLEMENTED.
ENDERS

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